

KASHMIRIS WITH JEWISH ROOTS

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Abstract

The Kashmiris are historically linked with the Jews, since occurrence of the Mano's Great Flood, which is also named as the Noah's Deluge. In Hebrew, he is named as Noah; in English, Noe, Noach or Noah, in Arabic Nuh, in Sanskrit Manu; in Chinese, Nuxwa, in Egyptian, Nun, and in Kashmiri and Tibetan as Noh. This catastrophic event utterly devastated the earth sometime between 2,000 and 3,000 BC. According to the Hebrew scriptures Noah was the son of Lemeach and the tenth generation after Adam. When he was 600 years old, God decided to send a great flood to destroy the wicked mankind. As Noah was a righteous man, God instructed him to built an ark for himself, his family and every living thing of all flesh, for keeping them alive. It rained heavily for 40 days and the waters covered the earth for 150 days. This ark of Noah moved towards the mountains for safety and came to rest there. Thus Noah's three sons, Japheth, Shem and Ham became the founders of the population in Europe, Asia and Africa. According to the Holy Quran, Noah, built a huge ship as inspired by God and it sailed amidst waves towards some mountain. It appears that both the Jews and the Muslims

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carry similar stories of the Great Flood. The Hindus too have the same story of the Deluge, but in some what different form. According to the *Mahabharata Purana*, the three worlds were plunged into an ocean of death. But in the midst of the destroying waves a large vessel sent by God stood, in which had been stored all herbs, all seeds, the pairs of brute animals, and the seven saints "Vishnu then appeared in the form of a fish and took the vessel to safety.

The most important Purana, connecting Kashmir with the Great Flood, is Kashmir's own sixth century Sanskrit work named the *Nilamata Purana*. It contains a legend about the birth of vast sea called *Satisara*. This legend is basically based on the memory of the Noah's Deluge, when the country of Kashmir had submerged under water. According to the *Nilamata Purana*, it was god Vishnu, who converted himself into a fish and guided the ark containing seeds of all life towards the peaks of high mountain ranges. After the drainage of water, some of the boats carrying the seeds of life settled down on Karewas of the Valley. The first perpendicular rock, which emerged out the Noah's Deluge, was the Hill of Sharika, now known as Chakreshwari on Koh-i-Maran in Srinagar. On this rock is engraved a mystical diagram known as *Sri-Chakra*, or the Star of David, the national symbol of the Jews. Since then, Kashmiris- originally Pundits and later Muslims, are ethnologically and historically linked with Jews. Their countenance, their garb, their caps and turbans, their behaviour and manner, their physical beauty and beards, all point to the fact that they belong to that ancient nation. The present paper examines critically the thesis in the light of available evidence of all sorts.

The Kashmiris are historically linked with the Jews, since occurrence of the Mano's Great Flood, which is also named as the Noah's Deluge. In Hebrew, he is named as *Noah*; in English, *Noe*, *Noach* or *Noah*, in Arabic *Nuh*, in Sanskrit *Manu*; in Chinese, *Nuwa*,

in Egyptian, *Nun*, and in Kashmiri and Tibetan as *Noh*. This catastrophic event utterly devastated the earth sometime between 2,000 and 3,000 BC. According to the Hebrew scriptures Noah was the son of Lemeach and the tenth generation after Adam. When he was 600 years old, God decided to send a great flood to destroy the wicked mankind. As Noah was a righteous man, God instructed him to build an ark for himself, his family and every living thing of all flesh, for keeping them alive. It rained heavily for 40 days and the waters covered the earth for 150 days. This ark of Noah moved towards the mountains for safety and came to rest there. Thus Noah's three sons, Japheth, Shem and Ham became the founders of the population in Europe, Asia and Africa. According to the *Holy Quran*, Noah, built a huge ship as inspired by God and it sailed amidst waves towards some mountain. It appears that both the Jews and the Muslims carry similar stories of the Great Flood. The Hindus too have the same story of the Deluge, but in some what different form. According to the *Mahabharata Purana*, the three worlds were plunged into an ocean of death. But in the midst of the destroying waves a large vessel sent by God stood, in which had been stored all herbs, all seeds, the pairs of brute animals, and the seven saints "Vishnu then appeared in the form of a fish and took the vessel to safety.

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Chak-eshwari on Koh-i-Maran in Srinagar. On this rock is engraved a mystical diagram known as *Sri-Chakra*, or the *Star of David*, the national symbol of the Jews. Since then, Kashmiris- originally Pundits and later Muslims, are ethnologically and historically linked with Jews. Their countenance, their garb, their caps and turbans, their behaviour and manner, their physical beauty and beards, all point to the fact that they belong to that ancient nation.

The Jews

The term, Jew has been derived from Judah or the follower of Judaism. The word is pronounced in various languages, like this:

Judaeus	-	Latin
Loudaios	-	Greek
Yhudai	-	Aramaic
Yhudi	-	Hebrew
Yahud	-	Arabic
Yahoodi	-	Urdu
Yohod	-	Kashmiri

It may incidentally be remarked that *Joo* or *Juw* used to be suffixed to every name in Kashmir in the past, and this practice was common to both the Kashmiri Pandits as well as the Kashmiri Muslims. This *figo-fix* signifies respect and points to the origin of this ancient race.

The Children of Israel

The Israelites or the Children of Israel are known as *Bani-Israel* in the East. Jacob had twelve sons from his legal wives and concubines and from them are derived the twelve tribes of Israel. Two divisions marked themselves off according to descent from Leah or Rachel. As such, Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar and Zebulum reckoned themselves to the former and Joseph and Benjamin to the latter. The inferior lineage from the concubines

consisted of children of two groups; Gad and Asher of one group and Dan and Naphtali of the other group. However they all knew themselves as the children of the same father.

They fought themselves for the *Holy Land*, with the result that Joshua partitioned them into two groups, and got them settled in the divided Palestine. Saul united them and Solomon gave them sovereignty. But due to their internal strife, they got divided again, and the two tribes were lost to them. Subsequently, the remaining ten tribes became slaves of various kings, with the result that they got scattered in different lands. Some of them got mixed up with other nationalities and lost their identity. It was only some remnants that remained in Palestine. The fate of the ten tribes has become a mystery.

In the 6th century B.C., the Jews suffered persecutions and had to run away towards Syria and Babylon. In subsequent years, most of them were arrested and made prisoners. Persecution of the Jews continued for centuries. They were either killed, made prisoners or had to run away. During the period of the Indo-Greek kings, most of the Jews, who were skilled in many arts and crafts migrated towards Afghanistan, Bactria and the hilly areas of Gilgit and Chitral. During the succeeding periods, they were lost in various lands; for they had traversed long distances. They also reached the outskirts of Kashmir and settled in Hazara. Definite information is available about the Jewish tribes of Hazara who mostly occupied themselves in trade and commerce. Hazara is situated in the south-west of Kashmir. The existence of the Jews in Central Asian countries has been testified by various authors.

The Jews in Persia.

In about 539 BC the Babylonians were defeated by Cyrus the Great. The Jews hailed this defeat, for they had suffered at the hands of the Babylonians, who had burnt the Temple at Jerusalem. At that time, most of them had been carried away as slaves to

Babylon, and employed as agricultural labour. Cyrus the Great, not only liberated them from slavery but allowed them to be settled in Palestine. They were allowed to establish their State and rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem. Having attained freedom and status, most of them settled in Persia and established themselves as rich traders. Now, they started to move towards the east and went as far as Central Asia. However, they looked to Jerusalem as their spiritual centre, where Menahem had established a subject State of Judea. Sensing that he had become too powerful, the Persians overthrew him in about 485 BC. Incidentally, it may be mentioned that the Jews thought of Cyrus the Great as their saviour and made him a god in their writings. However, the Jews not only influenced the Zoroasterians of Persia, but also were influenced by the foreign doctrines, thus resulting in a mixed ethical and religious code. It was a happy blending of Judaic and Zoroastrian thought. It was during this period that the Persian art and architecture entered Palestine and the Jews built large and luxurious villas there. But during the later period, reaction prevailed among the Jews and the priestly class under the guidance of Ezra succeeded in establishing orthodoxy among them. He forbade modernism and foreign ideas and even forced the Jews to abandon their Persian wives. This resulted in complete isolation of the Jews of Palestine from the Jews of other lands.

The Jews in Afghanistan

The Bactrians and the Skythians are early tribes that settled in the region, now known as Afghanistan. The people of this country are known as Pathans, Pashtoons, or Pakhtoons and their origin is shrouded in mystery and myth. It is historical fact that Afghanistan was an important country, through which the Silk Road, the great trans-Asian highway linking China with Rome passed connecting Persia, Asia Minor, Kashmir and Central Asia, since ancient times. In fact, the word, Afghan comes from the Armenian word, *Aghvan*, meaning the mountaineers. This establishes a his-

torical connection between the Afghans, and the Syrian captives of Armenia.

Among the tribes of Afghanistan, we find the names, which indicate their connection with the Greeks from pre-historic times. But it was during the invasion of Alexander that the Greeks, not only settled in various parts of Afghanistan, but also established their kingdoms in the region. During this period about seventy Israeli priests did settle in Herat in Afghanistan. Some of the Hebrew prophets are buried at Balk and Ibn-i-Batuta, the famous world traveller, makes special mention about the Tomb of Ezekiel there. Another prophet of the Jews, Samuel is buried on the side of the road leading to Khurasan from Hamadan. Another Hebrew Prophet is buried at Rang-barang near Bajoor in Aghanistan.

It is interesting to note that the Afghans carry their tribal names even at present and use them as cognomen. Prominent among these tribes are the clans of *Ammon-Zye*, *Amma-Zye*, *Davood-Zye*, *Abraham-Zye*, *Shemoon-Zye*, *Yusuf-Zye*, *Ayub-khel*, *Yayah-kel*, *Yaqoob-khel*, *Yunus-khel* and *Zakaria-khel*. The term *Zye* in Pashto means the son or the lineage that would show that they connect their lineage with the Hebrew prophets. All these clans do possess their ancestral pedigrees, which carry their ancestral line right up to Jacob.

The Afghans call themselves *Bani Israel* or the Children of Israel. They say that they migrated to Ghore and Bamian during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar and got converted to Islam due to the efforts of Khalid-bin-Walid in about 633 AD. Some Afghans claim their descent from Cush and Ham and have mixed the Mosaic Law with their social code.

The Jews in India

There is a theory that like the Aryans, the Semites also originated from India, and migrated towards the west. It is further observed that the extraordinary persistence of the Jewish commu-

nity has its basis in the caste system of the Hindus, where the Brahmanas would never mix with other people, nor allow any one to join their caste. However, it cannot be denied that there had been much traffic between the north-west India and the Middle East during ancient times. Even at present, there are several Jewish settlements on the western coast of India, at Bombay, Cochin, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, Manipur, Mizoram, Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh. In Kerala, the Jews are divided into the *White Jews* and the *Black Jews*. The groups do not mix; rather look down upon each other claiming to belong to the original followers of Judaism. They came to Kerala 2000 years ago and the king granted lands in their favour. One of their chiefs, Joseph Rabban was granted the title of *Srinadan Moplah*.

Recent researches have revealed the existence of the remnants of *Bani Israel* in Burma, Nagaland and Kashmir. In 1982, Hazrat Mir Alam Badshah, the Head of the Pashtoon community living in Gutli Bagh, Ganderbal in Kashmir explained that they are from the Children of Israel. He said that they have migrated from Afghanistan, where live the other tribes of the *Bani-Israel*. They were once followers of Moses and later converted to Islam. A Muslim tribe called Yudu, in Yusmarg in Kashmir, also identifies itself with the *Bani-Israel*.

We are informed that the first two tribes which were deported to Afghanistan were that of Gad and Reuben. This happened when Ashurnazirpal ruled over Assyria. May be this migration took place during the last decade of the 8th century BC. Out of the two tribes mentioned above, the Reubenites proceeded further towards Hazara and Kashmir while the Gaddites premanently settled in Afghanistan. The descendants of the Gaddites are known as *Gaddirani* during present times. According to another source, this deportation of Jews to Afghanistan continued in an organised manner up to the reign of Nebuchadnezzar (539 BC). It will be of interest to know that Nebuchadnezzar is known in Kashmir as

Bakhatnassur and there are many stories woven around his name. Among the Kashmiris, a person who is a dandy and a rogue is nick named as Bokhatnassur.

The Israeli tribes who had suffered persecutions got themselves settled in the hilly areas and the valleys of Kashmir, Hazara, Gilgit, and Chitral. Majority among them changed their religion from time to time and became Buddhists, Shaivites and Muslims. It has been observed by many writers that their faces, conduct and behaviour shows that they are the descendents of the ancient race of Israel. It has been testified by the Christian missionaries that the Kashmiris are the descendents of the Hebrews. Evidence regarding existence of the Jewish literature has been also found. Another writer, who conducted the land settlement of the Kashmir valley during the 19th century states that the majority of the Kashmiri people belong to the Semitic race. Their women with facial features are generally like their Jewish counterparts. It appears that the Kashmiris are no more except the lost tribes of Israel.

The Jews in Kashmir

The valley of Kashmir is named by its inhabitants as *Kasheer* because it was a settlement of a race known as *Kash* or *Cush* which was of the Semitic origin. These people found the towns of Kash, Kashan and Kashgar. Kash is a town in Bokhara, Kashan exists in Iran and Kashgar lies in the Chinese Turkistan. From earliest times, Kashmir is known as the paradise on earth. It has been claimed that many patients who suffered from fever and stomach trouble got recovered by drinking water of its springs. God almighty has given many blessings to this land, and for this reason, Kashmir is called the blessed land. Holy scriptures of the east have acclaimed it as the land of bliss. It is also a historical fact that many a prophets and saints of the world have visited Kashmir during their life-times. The Kashmiris call their country as *Kasheer*. The term, *Kasheer* means the abode of the *Kashur* people and *Kashur*

means those who eat meat. The Hindus believe that all their religious shrines are situated in the valley. Kashmir is also known as the *Garden of Solomon*, who got it populated in 100 BC.

In order to save themselves during the invasion of Alexander, some of the Jewish tribes spread into the mountain valleys of the Himalayas. They also reached Kashmir and Tibet via Afghanistan. These people brought their religious relics with them. Claudious found an ancient copy of Tora, in Kashmir, which was written on leather and its length consisted of 48 feet.

The Kush Tribe

Kush or Cush was the son of Ham and a grand son of Ham and a grand-son of Noah. He was the founder of the Kash or Cush tribe, which settled in the east. This tribe found Kash, a village near Bagdad. These people named rivers, mountain, cities and countries after the name of their ancestors, Kash or Cush. In Mesopotamia, they founded a kingdom and the Kashna river in that country is a testimony of this fact. Kash-mar a village near Nishapur in Iran was also found by them.. This tribe also proceeded towards Central Asia and found many settlements. Kash-mohra, a village in Merv; Kash, a village in Bokhara; Kash-band and Kash-ania, the villages in Samarkand, were their settlements in Central Asia. In Mesopotamia, the tribe, founded the towns of Kash-an, Kash-af and Kashsi. They also moved towards Afghanistan and found their settlements at Kash-kar, Kash-hil, Kash-ek and Kash-u. While the Hindu-Kush mountains are named after them, they also found a settlement in the south of mountain range, known as Kash-mor.

It was Babar, the founder of the Moghul dynasty in India, who pointed out in his memoirs that the etymology of the word Kasheer is derived from the Kash or Cush tribe, which inhabit the valley. This tribe settled in the region, now known as Kash-tawar, in the Doda District of Kashmir. Crossing the Pir-Panjal range, these people spread in the valley of Kashmir. Kush-tawar, in the

Pulwama District, Kash-nag, a spring in the Anantnag District, and Isae-Kush village bear the name of this tribe. This tribe was led by their leader, Kash-yapa into the valley and according to an old tradition, the name Kasheer is derived from him. However, it can not be denied that the Kush or Cush tribe, established its sovereignty in the valley and history records some kings of this tribe, namely, Utpala-Kusha, and Hirneya-Kusha. The latter has also been mentioned as the hero of a fairy tale in the *Katha-sarit-sagara*, an ancient Sanskrit work of Kashmir. It also records Kanaka-Kusha, his father, as one of the kings of Kashmir. It is not only that one of the Semite tribes, namely the Kash or Cush settled in the valley but there is historical evidence regarding dispersment of the other Israeli tribes also around the valley of Kashmir. The tribes mentioned in the Old testament and those who retained their names in Kashmir are mentioned in other works.

The Jewish Traits

Many scholars have pointed out that the Kashmiris prepare their graves on the model of the Jewish tombs. Such a grave is called *Mosai Qabr* and its directed from east to west. The Gujjars in Kashmir, who are Muslims, term themselves as *Bani-Israel*. Their dress, as well as fashion of their hair is peculiarity of Jewish style. The paddle used by the Kashmiri boatmen is on the model of a heart and is in vogue even at present. Such paddles are never used in any country of the world except Palestine and Kashmir. The Kashmiri boatmen call themselves as the descendents of the prophet Noah. Old architecture in Kashmir reveals that the stairs leading to it, are always from the west. This is not the case with the ancient Hindu, Muslim or Buddhist architecture.

At Aish Muqam, we have the Rod of Moses, which is called *Asai-Sharif* or the esteemed staff.

The Tomb of Moses

The circumstances under which Moses died are shrouded in

mystery. Nothing is known about the tomb of Moses, except that he was buried in the valley of Moab near Bethpeor, situated in a far off land in the east. It is believed that Moses was buried on the hill of Nabu overlooking the valley of Lolab and Bandipur in Kashmir. Some historical material is available to show that Moses came to Kashmir in his last days. He was buried at Booth on the hill Nabu in Bandipur. His tomb is visited by many a Kashmiri devotees. According to some, Moses came to Kashmir to preach them the word of God. The Jews believe that Moses disappeared and went to the *Promised Land*, in a far off land in the East. It is surprising that the five places mentioned regarding the *Promised Land* are; Bethpeor, Hasbun, Pisgah, Mt. Nebu and the valley of Moab, do exist in Kashmir even at present. According to the Western scholars, all these places have remained unidentified. But the Survey of India map reveals that all these places can be located in the Bandipur area. Bethpeor was known earlier as Behatpur in Kashmir and now is known as Bandipur.

Hashbun is now known Hashba, Pisgah is known as Pish, Moab is known as Mow and Nabu is known as Nabo or Nil-toop. All the above mentioned places do exist in the area in which the tomb of Moses is situated.

Moses was a prophet and he was ordered by God to refrain from entering Palestine and die on the hill of Nabo. '*Go thee, unto Mount Nabo and die, but thou shall not go unto the land, which I give to the Children of Israel*'. He had to obey the commands and went to Kashmir. People believed in him and his tomb is known as the shrine of the '*Prophet of the Book*'.

The Jewish Settlements

The Jews, after having settled in Kashmir found many villages and towns and some of these exist even at present. The Jewish immigration into Kashmir continued for many centuries and they went on adopting local religious traditions and customs. A

stage came, when they stopped such infiltration and they would allow only one or two Jews, to enter the valley every year.

Thus, it is not strange that many place names which are given in the Holy Bible do exist in Kashmir. Reference is invited to the following table, which shows the existing settlements:

Kashmiri Biblical

Aguru	Agur
Ashma	Ashma
Ashar	Ashew
Astera	Astore
Babal	Babel
Balpor	Balpura
Benatpore	Bandipor
Karan	Karan
Mattan	Mattan
Zelu	Zelah
Shopiyan	Shuyohan
Barsu	Bersu
Lasharun	Bethpeor
Nabo	Nabo
Doru	Dor
Harwan	Haran
Uri	Uri

The Jews uphold such things, as daily worship, regular prayers, intensive study and dietary laws, known as *Kashrut*. They insist on the separation of men and women in the synagogue. They also do not permit music during religious ceremonies. The same is the case with the Kashmiris, who are very particular about in-

tensive studies, regular prayers, dietary laws and separation of men and women during prayers. No instrumental music is played at the time of religious congregations.

Language and Culture

The aboriginal tribes, which settled in the valley of Kashmir after its emergence from water, evolved their own language, which may be termed as original Kashmiri. But with the advent of other tribes, such as the Khasite Aryans, their language underwent a change. However, researches reveal that the original Kashmiri words, idioms and proverbs are a mixture of many languages, such as, Aramaic, Hebrew, Sanskrit and Persian. We find traces of the Brahmi and Kharosti in Kashmir in the shape of inscriptions, tiles and numerals. It is a fact that both these alphabets are derived from the Aramaic alphabet, which was prevalent in Mesopotamia in the 5th century BC. It is for this reason that the present day Kashmiri language contains 30% Persian, 25% Arabic and 45% words from Sanskrit and other languages including Hebrew.

Similarly, many ceremonies, like that of birth, marriage, and death are same in Kashmir as prevalent in Palestine. The period of purification for ladies is about one month among both the nations. Levirate marriages are a common feature among the Jews as well as the Kashmiris. Mourning for the dead is fixed for forty days among both the people. Even the coffins to carry the dead are of the same design. The Jews always have their graves from east to west and such Mosai graves have been found in Kashmir with Hebrew inscriptions.

The Jews and the Kashmiris have some similar food habits such as eating of the smoked fish, using of oil only for cooking purposes.